In the Claims:

Please cancel claims 1-26 and add the following new claims 27-52:

What is claimed is:

--27. (New) A method of making a food product comprising a base of molded sausage meat, purée, or paste coated in a film comprising a temperature-resistant gel such as a gel of calcium alginate, the method comprising the following successive steps:

forming a sausage of raw sausage meat, purée, or paste, by causing it to pass through a preferably tubular mold;

cutting the sausage into segments having ends that are preferably rounded;

moving the segments while coating them in a first composition containing sodium alginate, so as to cover the segments in a film of said first composition; and

putting the coated segments into contact, preferably by immersion, with a second composition containing a calcium salt so as to cause a calcium alginate gel to form around the segments of raw sausage meat, purée, or paste, preferably in a proportion by weight of 0.1% to 15% of calcium chloride in said second composition.

28.(New) A method according to claim 27, wherein the coated products are drained and/or subjected to the action of an air jet after said first immersion in said composition and prior to being put into contact in said second composition in order to improve and homogenize the quality of the coating by the first composition.

29. (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein a step is performed of sprinkling the segments with said first composition prior to immersing said segments in said first composition in a bath, the coating composition preferably being sprayed onto the product in

distributed manner by forming a curtain, and more preferably said bath being fed by said curtain situated above said bath.

30. (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein the proportion by weight of sodium alginate in said first composition is less than 2%, and preferably greater than 0.5%.

31. (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein the sausage cutting tools are wetted with said first composition in order to lubricate them.

32. (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein:

a food product based on fibrous meat is prepared by causing the meat to pass through a tubular mold to form a sausage; and

the sausage is caused to contract and then to expand so as to cause at least a fraction of the fibers in the fibrous meat to take up a transverse orientation.

33. (New) A food product, in particular a sausage, comprising molded sausage meat or purée or paste coated by an alginate gel, obtained by a method according to claim 27.

34. (New) A food product, in particular a sausage, comprising molded sausage meat or purée or paste coated in an alginate gel according to claim 33, the product comprising a proportion by weight of alginate in said coating lying in the range 0.5% to 2%.

35. (New) A food product, in particular a sausage, comprising a sausage based on fibrous meat according to claim 33, the product including fibers of the fibrous meat that have been caused to take up a transverse orientation.

36. (New) A composition for covering food products, comprising sodium alginate suitable for use in particular in a method according to claim 27, wherein the alginate is mixed with vegetable proteins and/or sugar and/or maltodextrin, and wherein the composition comprises a proportion by weight of sodium alginate in the composition lying in the range 0.5% to 2% and is in the form of a powder dispersed in an aqueous solution, said composition presenting fluidity that is sufficiently high to enable it to be transported under drive from a pump and/or to be sprayed for sprinkling the food products that are to be covered.

37. (New) Apparatus for making food products from sausage meat (or purée, or paste), useful in particular for implementing a method according to claim 27, and for preparing products according to claim 33, the apparatus comprising a mold, means for introducing the meat into the mold, separator means serving to separate the meat into segments, and covering means for coating the meat in a gelling composition, in particular sodium alginate, wherein said covering means makes it possible to ensure that the sausage meat, purée, or paste is covered homogenously by said gelling composition.

38. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, wherein the covering means comprise a first vessel suitable for containing a first bath of a first composition for coating the products,

and a second vessel suitable for containing a second bath of a second composition for coating the product, and means for transporting the segments serving to transport the segments from the first vessel to the second vessel, said transport means including means for causing the segments to drop, and preferably including drainage means for draining the coated products and/or air-injection means for homogenizing said covering.

39. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, including means (in particular ejection nozzles and/or transport channels) for introducing the gelling composition close to the moving separator means, preferably upstream therefrom, such that said composition contributes to limiting or avoiding adhesion of the meat on the moving separator means, to reducing friction between said moving means, and to facilitating regular shaping of the segments, and in particular of their ends.

40. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, including a plurality of tubular molds or nozzles enabling a plurality of meat sausages to be formed simultaneously, and a plurality of moving shaping and cutting means associated respectively with the tubular molds and enabling the sausages to be separated simultaneously into segments.

41. (New) Apparatus according to claim 40, including means for distributing meat to the tubular molds, which meat is delivered via a meat feed orifice or duct orifice.

42. (New) Apparatus according to claim 41, in which the meat distribution - or separation - means comprise a rotary structure defining a distribution cavity communicating with the tubular molds and also with the meat feed orifice.

43. (New) Apparatus according to claim 42, in which the rotary structure presents an outside surface including rotary drive means, in particular an outside surface carrying teeth suitable for meshing with a drive member such as a gearwheel, and in which said rotary structure includes knives.

44. (New) Apparatus according to claim 42, in which the distribution cavity presents symmetry about the axis of rotation of the rotary structure, in which the meat feed orifice is substantially centered on said axis of rotation, and in which the meat outlet orifices via which the distribution cavity communicates with the tubular molds extend symmetrically relative to said axis so as to encourage balanced distribution to the tubular molds of the meat delivered by the feed orifice.

45. (New) Apparatus according to claim 40, in which the molds are parallel and in substantially horizontal alignment, so as to encourage segments of meat sausage to be delivered in line with a conveyor belt conveying the segments from the outlet of the separator means to the inlet of means for covering them by immersion.

46. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, in which the tubular mold(s) is/are fixed to a separator and shaping structure and to a meat pusher unit by removable connection means facilitating removal of the mold(s) for cleaning and/or exchange purposes.

47. (New) Apparatus according to claim 40, comprising a frame supporting a structure for separating and shaping segments and also means for distributing meat to the tubular molds, in particular the rotary structure according to claim 42, which frame is adjustable or deformable, in particular telescopic, so as to make it easier to install and remove tubular molds and/or meat distribution means.

48. (New) Apparatus according to claim 38, in which the moving separator means comprise two blades mounted to move in reciprocating translation on a structure (or head) for separating and shaping segments, the blades forming a guillotine, the end of each blade being shaped firstly to separate the continuous sausage into segments while the blades are in a first relative position in which they are closed, and secondly to shape, preferably round, an end of a segment of meat sausage while the blades are in a second relative position in which they are partially open.

49. (New) Apparatus according to claim 48, in which each of the blades include a semicircular notch, the edge of the notch being tapered to form a cutting edge of chamfer of substantially spherical shape.

50. (New) Apparatus according to claim 48, having two actuators for driving the two blades respectively, a control unit suitable for controlling the operation of the actuators and also for controlling the operation of the means for introducing meat into the mold, the control unit including means for individually controlling the two actuators and the introduction means so as to cause meat to pass through an orifice defined by the blades, when the tubular mold is in a position in which it is partially closed by the blades, thereby causing the section of a segment of sausage to decrease progressively in the vicinity of its end in order to facilitate shaping the ends of the segments.

51. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, including means for constricting the flow of sausage-shaped meat, suitable for modifying the orientation of fibers in the sausage of meat, for improving cohesion of the sausage of meat, and/or for improving its behavior during cooking.

52. (New) Apparatus according to claim 37, including means for homogenizing the film or layer of the composition coating the product, which means are disposed between said first and second vessels defined in claim 38, said means preferably including nozzles for blowing air (or an appropriate gas) onto the products.--